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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Security Council expresses deep concern about escalation of violence in Burundi and deplores ethnic killings; calls on all parties to fully respect Convention of Government.

+ Special Representative Akashi voices concern about situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina; warns current violence could lead to new war, with incalculable consequences for whole region.

+ Secretary-General hails ONUSAL's accomplishments, but says key parts of El Salvador peace accords remain to be fulfilled; United Nations should maintain small team in country to verify compliance and provide good offices.

+ Secretary-General to convene International Meeting on Mine Clearance in Geneva from 5 to 7 July.

+ Bold conservation proposals are needed as time runs out for world's fisheries, Greenpeace tells Conference on Fish Stocks.

+ UNHCR says influx of displaced people from Chechnya to Dagestan has increased sharply in past week; appeals for donations of tents as soon as possible.

+ WFP to provide food aid to destitute Palestinians in Gaza and Jericho; says expected socio-economic improvements since Israel-PLO peace accords have not materialized.

+ Preparatory Committee for United Nations Fiftieth Anniversary discusses arrangements for special commemorative meeting in October.

+ Nine draft resolutions introduced in Commission on Status of Women.

+ Human Rights Committee elects third Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur; discusses draft general comment on article 25 of International Covenant on Civil Rights.

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The Security Council today expressed deep concern about the escalation of violence in Burundi. In a statement read out by its President, Li Zhaoxing (China), the Council condemned the murders of the Minister of Energy and Mines and of the former Mayor of Bujumbura by extremists, and deplored the ensuing ethnic killings of many people. It also condemned the activities of the extremist elements who tried to destabilize the country and threaten the whole region, and encouraged all States to take measures to prevent them from travelling abroad and receiving any kind of support.

The Council reaffirmed its support for the Convention of Government of 10 September, which provided an institutional framework for national reconciliation. It called on all political parties, military forces and elements of civil society to fully respect and implement it in a spirit of dialogue, moderation and compromise. The Council underlined the urgency of organizing a national debate with the participation of all elements of the nation with a view to consolidating national reconciliation and restoring democracy. It invited the Secretary-General to help the various political parties and elements of civil society to initiate that comprehensive consultation.

The Council warned that those who committed crimes against humanity were individually responsible for them, and would be brought to justice. It specifically warned that if acts of genocide were committed in Burundi, it would consider taking appropriate measures to bring to justice under international law those who might have committed such acts.

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Special Representative Yasushi Akashi has said the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a cause of great concern. In a statement issued today, he noted that the current Cessation of Hostilities Agreement would expire in little more than a month. The parties to the conflict, who had freely entered into that Agreement, appeared determined to plunge the country into a new war, with incalculable consequences for the region as a whole.

The Bosnian Government's recent military offensives were clear breaches of the Cease-fire and Cessation of Hostilities Agreements, Mr. Akashi continued. Retaliatory actions by the Bosnian Serbs were also unjustified. The increasing difficulties facing the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), and the lack of cooperation by all sides -- especially the Government side -- underscored the need for an immediate return to the peace process.

Mr. Akashi urgently called on all the parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina to seriously reflect on the grave and far-reaching consequences of their current actions. He urged them to desist from acts of provocation, offensives

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and counter-offensives, and to respect all agreements entered into. Self-restraint was particularly needed now, as renewed diplomatic efforts were underway to achieve a final peace settlement.

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The United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) helped the Salvadorians take giant strides away from a violent and closed society towards a democratic order, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. However, in a report dated 24 March, he said some commitments entered into by the Government of El Salvador and the Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN) in the peace accords remained to be fulfilled. Unfortunately, those commitments were so important that the irreversibility of the peace process as a whole would be called into question as long as that was the case.

ONUSAL's mandate will expire on 30 April, 45 months after the opening of a pioneering human rights mission and 39 months after the formal cease-fire that accompanied full deployment. In his report, the Secretary-General said he had considered recommending that the Mission be extended beyond that date. However, members of the Security Council had indicated that the time had come to bring it to a close. He proposed that the United Nations maintain a small team of professionals, with support staff, in El Salvador to verify compliance with pending aspects of the peace accords and to provide good offices.

The Secretary-General stressed that Salvadorian institutions, strengthened and reformed pursuant to the peace accords, would now have to assume their responsibilities in full. He expressed the hope that legislative action would be rapidly taken to consolidate those institutions. The United Nations would be ready to lend assistance in that regard.

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The Secretary-General has decided to convene an International Meeting on Mine Clearance in Geneva from 5 to 7 July. The meeting will aim to improve international coordination of assistance in mine clearance, to heighten awareness of the problem of uncleared mines, and to generate the resources needed to expand United Nations efforts in this field. It is being convened in response to a request made by the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session.

In a report on assistance in mine clearance, the Secretary-General points out that there are over 100 million land mines in 64 affected countries. As many as 5 million more are being laid each year. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, more than 800 people are killed each month by land mines and thousands more are maimed. The financial cost of clearing the world of the menace is estimated at more than $30 billion.

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Bold proposals on conservation of depleted fish stocks are needed as time is running out for the world's fisheries, Greenpeace told the Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks yesterday. As the Conference concluded its general debate on a draft agreement on the sustainable use and management of fish stocks, Greenpeace called for respect for the rights of small-scale fisheries and indigenous workers in the fishing industry. The precautionary approach in management of fish stocks should be mandatory, and there should be multilateral mechanisms for effective monitoring, control and surveillance of high-seas fisheries.

The 48-article draft agreement lays out general principles to guide coastal and distant-water-fishing States in fulfilling their conservation and management duties under the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention. Those duties include measures to eliminate overfishing and ensure long-term sustainability of stocks.

Other speakers stressed the importance of cooperation between coastal States and distant-water-fishing States through bilateral agreements. Mexico said the draft agreement should be acceptable to both distant-water States and coastal States and should include provisions on the involvement of regional fisheries agencies and organizations in conservation and management measures.

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The influx of displaced people from war-torn Chechnya to neighbouring Dagestan has increased sharply over the past week, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). There have been reports that at least 30,000 people have fled fighting and continuous heavy shelling in the Gudermez-Shali region.

Dagestan has already been struggling to cope with more than 87,000 displaced Chechens, and all available public accommodation centres are full. The authorities have called for the establishment of tent camps, and UNHCR has appealed to donors to provide tents as soon as possible.

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The World Food Programme (WFP) has announced that it will provide food aid to 36,000 of the most destitute Palestinians in Gaza and Jericho. It will provide 1,835 metric tons of wheatflour, pulses and sugar to cover basic needs for six months, at an estimated cost of $900,000.

Major improvements in the socio-economic conditions of the Palestinians and a massive influx of foreign aid were expected after the peace accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). However, according to the WFP, those expectations were not met. Out of a total of $650 million pledged in external aid for 1994, only $140 million has been received.

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The Preparatory Committee for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations has decided that the special commemorative meeting taking place at Headquarters from 22 to 24 October will be held in six sessions, or "frames".

The Committee also decided not to have a linear, continuous speakers' list for the meeting. Instead, it favoured a frame-by-frame approach, by which each of the six sessions would hear from speakers at various levels of national office.

A number of representatives supported the proposal that lots be drawn to determine which country would speak at each meeting. Some proposed a system combining the lottery with the expression of a slot preference by each delegation.

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The Secretary-General would be requested to see to the preparation of a long-term joint work plan on the human rights of women for the Centre for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women, under a draft resolution introduced in the Commission on the Status of Women. The draft, introduced by Australia and supported by 81 co-sponsors, was one of nine presented to the Commission yesterday.

Another draft resolution would have the Economic and Social Council decide that the Commission should establish a working group to elaborate a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The optional protocol would introduce the right of individuals to petition in cases of violations of women's human rights.

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The Human Rights Committee has elected Prafullachandra Natwarlal Bhagwati, former Attorney-General and expert from India, as its third Vice-Chairman. It also agreed that Christine Chanet, expert from France, who is absent from the current session owing to illness, will be elected as Rapporteur upon her return.

Also yesterday, the Committee continued its consideration of a draft general comment on article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It provisionally approved the first two paragraphs of the draft, which describe the overall scope of Article 25 and its place in the Covenant. The article protects the right to take part in public affairs, to vote or be elected, and to have access to public service.

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